

VZCZCXRO9640
OO RUEHDBU RUEHPW
DE RUEHBUL #0841/01 0940700
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 040700Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8196
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000841

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS USAID FOR ASIA/SCAA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/04/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: SUBJ: ZABUL GOVERNANCE ADRIFT

REF: KABUL 321

Classified By: PRT and Sub-National Governance Counselor Valerie C. Fowler for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) Governor Mohammed Ashraf Naseri arrived to his new post in Zabul on April 1. He arrives in a province adrift, with little economic or commercial possibilities to boost the hopes or expectations of its subsistence farmers. Tensions among more than 20 tribes make Zabul's political landscape fluid, and could lay the conditions for a difficult landing for Governor Naseri. Naseri's difficult reputation and the perception that the IDLG placed political concerns over good governance in his appointment could further augment his challenges, but his arrival speeches suggest he understands that he must succeed in delivering basic services. The PRT is poised to push the new governor on a few key governance issues, and set up the conditions for some easy victories, but in the end, tribal machinations could undermine his tenure unless he finds a way to rise above these disputes to deliver results to a province starved for governance and basic services. End Summary.

Zabul Regularly Gets the Short-End

2. (C) Long considered little more than an appendage of Kandahar, with less than half a million residents spread over 12 mountainous districts, Zabul province does not presently have a lot going for it. The Taliban insurgency remained strong through the winter, with repeated IED attacks against coalition forces and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) on major roads. Local security officials expect that spring will only bring more attacks, as Taliban commanders return from their winter hideaways in Pakistan. Governance does not extend far beyond the governor's compound and a few understaffed government buildings in central Qalat. The ministry line directors -- mainly local recruits, because educated and ambitious Afghans have no desire to work in Zabul -- get little support from Kabul and often do not have enough staff in their offices to manage the few programs they have.

3. (C) The district administrators are ineffective and largely absent from their districts, leaving the outlying areas with no government representatives other than a handful of police and Afghan National Army (ANA). The ANA is making progress in establishing itself as a professional force, and is commonly thought to be the only government element in Zabul capable of delivering a few services. The judiciary has five judges in Qalat prone to absenteeism and none outside the provincial capital, and the prosecutor laments that only four of the 61 positions allocated to his office in Zabul have been filled. Poor security and fear of the Taliban make many organizations and individuals afraid to

press for better governance projects or public services.

Nazari Replaces Afghanistan,s Longest Serving Governor

¶4. (C) After four years and four days in Zabul, Afghanistan,s longest serving governor, Delbar Jan Arman, was transferred March 19 to Baghdis province. Simultaneously, the governor of Baghdis, Naseri, was appointed to Zabul. Governor Naseri arrived in Zabul on April 1 and addressed an assembly of several hundred provincial officials and elders. He emphasized delivery of basic services, education, and his expectation that line directors and district chiefs would do their jobs or be replaced. An accompanying IDLG member, Sayed Roydar, also spoke to the crowd and took jabs at departing Governor Arman, warning that Naseri would suffer the same fate if he did not deliver security and meet the needs of the people.

¶5. (C) Public opinion of Arman had deteriorated in the last six months, as residents felt he was increasingly isolated and out of touch, but truly soured after a series of protests in January and February that came to national media attention and pressured President Karzai to act. Zabulis protested against Special Forces operations in December and January that were perceived to have killed civilians (Reftel). Arman had already come into Kabul,s crosshairs in November 2008 over his detention of six provincial officials who were eventually released after heavy lobbying by their political patrons in Kabul. The final straw was Arman,s January decision after a two year legal battle to destroy rows of shops lining Highway One and relocate them to a

KABUL 00000841 002 OF 002

newly-constructed bazaar a few miles down the road despite the protest of many of the shop owners. After the demolition, protests against Arman, Deputy Governor Gulab Shah and Qalat Mayor Janat Gul frequently made national news, prompting Karzai to send a team of investigators to examine the complaints and ultimately replace the governor.

Nasari Will Face Tribal Rivalry Challenges

¶6. (C) Arman suspected that Zabul,s parliamentarians may have conspired against him in Qalat and Kabul, and rallied public opinion against him. Tribal rivalries among the 20 main tribes in Zabul have undercut every previous governor. Despite maintaining a surprising peaceful balance and making significant progress on a sixty-year dispute between the Shamulzai and Naseri groups, Arman also fell victim to this perennial tribal political maneuvering. PRT contacts, including the NDS head and Provincial Council chief, fear that agitators8 plan to make things difficult for Naseri, who already carries the burden of coming from the Nasir tribe, chief rivals to the Shamulzai tribe in southern Zabul. Privately, Wazir told the PRT he also worried that a &small minority8 would create more political problems in Zabul.

Naseri Comes with His Own Problems

¶7. (C) The IDLG appointed Naseri to Zabul Province despite their recognition) acknowledged in private conversations with PRT officers) Naseri,s poor performance and allegations of wide-ranging corruption. In Zabul, Naseri faces a population that has benefitted little from the provincial or national government. The Provincial Council chief and others report being &pessimistic8 that Naseri can do anything to move the province forward, and allege that the Tukhi tribe and its key troublemakers will likely try to undermine Naseri from the start.

Comment

18. (C) To set the conditions for a successful tenure, PRT will advise Naseri to concentrate on three things: connecting with the people, delivering basic services, and demonstrating good governance. By traveling to outlying districts and demonstrating his accessibility to all regions and tribes, by sorting out World Food Program (WFP) and Rural Rehabilitation and Development (RRD) problems (as well as issues with electricity in Qalat city), and by holding local officials (particularly the absentee district chiefs) more accountable, Naseri could establish himself as a capable leader who could win over the people of Zabul. However, this will require the ability to balance ethnic tensions while demanding performance of local officials, a skill set Naseri did not display in Baghdis. The PRT also will closely monitor the activities of the Tukhi & troublemakers⁸ to minimize their influence and ability to destabilize the province.

19. (U) This cable has been coordinated with PRT Commander.
RICCIARDONE